

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

JESUS AND THE WORLD OF WORKERS

JESUS THE CARPENTER

Michael Karimattam

"TO CULTIVATE AND GUARD EDEN" (GEN 2:15):
REFLECTIONS ON A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF WORK

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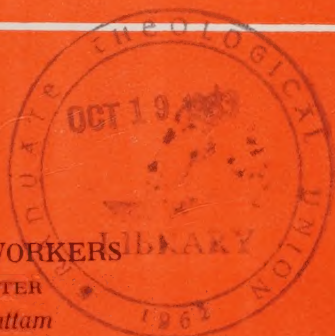
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KARMA: WORK FOR LIBERATION AND MEANS OF BONDAGE:
TOWARDS A HINDU THEOLOGY OF WORK

Francis X. D'sa

POPE JOHN PAUL'S LETTER ON HUMAN WORK

Stan Loudusamy



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JEEVADHARA

The Living Christ

JESUS
AND THE WORLD OF WORKERS

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Editorial

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is about work; about some aspects of a rich, basic and beautiful theme.

"The World of Workers", reflects the work experience of labourers as registered by some who live close to them. In their experience work is a burdensome drudgery. It is divorced from intellectual life, creative vision and freedom. It is forced upon men and women as a means of survival. It is no longer a joyful exercise and actualization of human life by which human needs are fulfilled in the human community and further human possibilities are pursued in shared freedom. Work is alienated and debased in a dehumanising system in which human labour power has become merchandise sold and bought in the market. Karl Marx has called attention to a common experience of all of us: workers toil generation after generation and remain deprived and poor while the massive wealth they create by their labour accumulates as a hostile power and lifts itself up against them, as the oppressive power of capital.

But originally work was meant to be a joyful activity, creative and affirmative of life. In and through authentic work, human beings relate to nature, transforming it, humanising it, assimilating it, and making it their own extended bodily self. The whole of nature is, in terms of work, the extension of the self of each human being and of all human beings together. It is the social body of our individual social selves. In the context of work we invent tools and go on improving upon them. In and through work human beings relate also, and in particular, to one another. They organise work, share labour, complement each other, and produce together what can meet the needs of each and all. In the process they not only discover nature with its riches, secrets and promises; they discover one another, and they discover themselves and grasp themselves ever more deeply and fully. As needs are met through work, new possibilities to be fulfilled through work are discovered too. Work is thus the human activity of transforming nature, remoulding the earth, recreating ourselves, building community and perceiving new values and meanings which are then embodied in songs and myths and rites, thus giving rise to culture, the human milieu of genuine human existence.

God therefore placed human beings on the earth to till it and keep it. It is this vocation of man that J. Pathrapankal's study presents. Through work we are with God, co-creators of the world and of ourselves. Jesus came into a world of alienation to renew existence. It is delightful and hope-giving to watch him enter the scene as a working class man and living and moving

mostly in the world of workers and of the poor, choosing working class men as his close associates and heirs to his movement, inviting the toiling masses to come to him: he is here to liberate life and labour from all alienation and restore them to authenticity. Michael Karimattam reflects on this aspect of Jesus' life. Though early christians tended to present Jesus as a royal messianic figure, the Johannine tradition still remembers him as a worker and a friend of workers who gets a warm and tasty breakfast ready for them as they return from the cold and fatigue of a night's labour on the lake of Galilee.

Francis D'Sa's study of Work, nishkamakarma, in the BhagavadGita comes to conclusions analogous to those of Marx. Self-centred work, private appropriation and production not oriented to the social-cosmic totality is enslaving and alienating. Liberating and life-giving work is free of crabbing egotism; it is socialised work for the benefit of all.

It is rather strange that despite the Bible and despite the fact that most men and most christians are workers, a theology of work did not develop in the churches. For centuries the church stressed the relative insignificance of this life. New recognition is accorded to human activity and human achievement. But from the time of Constantine the workers' movement that stemmed from Jesus had been captured by non-workers and affluent classes whose elaborate theology had little room for a question about workers and serfs and the toil of the masses. It is therefore in the secular sphere by men like Marx that remarkably profound analysis of the nature of work and of the laboring class has been achieved. Later and slowly did the church too wake up to such issues, in the person of a Chenu or a Wyzhinski, and began a search for a theology of work. The most recent church word on the matter is Pope John Paul's encyclical letter on labour, *Laborem Exercens*. Following Marx the Pope affirms the primacy of labour; but then he gives up this position by speaking approvingly of wage labour, ignoring its many-sided dehumanising alienations. Stan Lourdasamy offers us one of many possible critical meditations on this encyclical.

In the years to come our faith will have to reflect more deeply and thoroughly on the meaning and mystery of work and the historical role of the laboring masses.

Jesus the Carpenter

Christological titles of dignity such as Christ, King, Son of God, Lord, Saviour have always received great attention from the part of scholars and simple believers alike. The most primitive christological confessions were formulated under such titles; they still function as the corner stone of christian faith, and rightly so. It is from the vantage point of the Easter experience that the whole earthly life and ministry of Jesus are examined; it is with the eyes of faith in the exalted Lord that the believers look at Jesus. Recent studies in Christology have come to focus more and more on the Jesus of history. Giving greater importance to the mode and content of Jesus' ministry and his contemporaries's reaction to it, scholars tend to view Jesus as a mighty prophet or the Eschatological Prophet. This tendency also is well rooted in scriptural evidence.

All these christologies, be they centred on the exalted Lord or the humiliated Servant or the rejected Prophet, seem to ignore the fact that Jesus was a carpenter from the unknown village of Nazareth. The NT apparently gives little importance to this particular detail; NT christologies ignore it; popular piety takes no note of it. After all, the manifestation of the Messiah begins with his baptism in Jordan (Act 10:37). What preceded was the hidden life about which we know little. However, the fact remains that 'till at the age of about thirty' (Lk 3:21). Jesus lived as an ordinary worker, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. Does this fact have any importance in understanding the Christ? Does Jesus the carpenter have anything to say to us today? This paper is a modest attempt to analyse this mostly neglected aspect of Jesus' life and to understand its implications for christology as well as for the life of the Church today.

It is not our purpose to resume the once fashionable opposition between the Jesus of History and the Christ of faith. Such a procedure obscures both the real significance of Jesus' historical existence as well as its implications for faith which affirms this

very historical person to be identical with the exalted Lord. In the New Testament, history and faith are intimately related and influence each other. It is the claim of the NT witnesses that the true meaning of the life, ministry and death of Jesus is perceived only with the eyes of faith. But it is equally important to note that the nature of their faith is determined from within by the very historical facts which they interpret. It is from the point of view of this intimate relationship between faith and history that we shall examine the life of Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth.

I

Apart from the remark by the unbelieving Nazarenes: "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mk 6:3), there is no direct reference in the NT to Jesus as a worker. But even a casual reader of the gospels will not fail to observe that the hero of the story is one who shares the lot of the workers and carries their anxieties and cares in his own heart. This concern may be best noticed in the style of his speech and the images he chooses. Jesus does not speak like a learned scribe quoting authorities and explaining traditions. He speaks with authority and originality, mostly in words and images picked up from the working class milieu of Palestine. Quite a number of his sayings and good many of his parables have a direct reference to the life of workers, be they farmers, fishermen, shepherds or housewives. Jesus is familiar with them and their problems. He addresses himself to them in their own language.

He understands the joy of farmers as they see their seeds sprout and grow, and first a blade, then ears and finally corn appear on them (Mk 14: 26-28). He knows that of all workers the farmers are the most dependent on nature and worst hit by the inclemencies of the weather; that they watch the changing face of the sky and plan their cultivation accordingly (Lk 12: 54). Jesus is familiar with the field they cultivate where weeds grow together with the seeds sown. Sometimes the seeds are eaten by birds, plants are crushed by pedestrians, and scorched in the sun. But, with sufficient rain, the well-prepared ground produces abundant crops. The fate of the seeds and the anxieties of the farmers provide imagery to Jesus in his preaching of the Kingdom of God (Mk 4: 1-9). The mustard seed

that grows into a big shrub (Mk 4:30-34), fig trees that inspite of hard work of the farmer often produce only luxuriant foliage and no fruits (Mk 11:12-14; Lk 13:6-9), vine that has to be pruned (Jn 15:2), the field that produces abundant crops (Lk 12: 13-21) - all these come up in the parables of Jesus.

. Fishermen are another category of workers in Galilee whose work and anxieties figure very much in Jesus' teaching. The fishing net that gathers all sorts of fish become for him an image of the Kingdom into which peoples of every colour and caste are invited. He is aware of the agony of the fishermen who after a night of hard and risky work at sea return to the shore with swollen eyes and empty nets (LK 5:5). He was so much one with their hard life that he sees his mission and that of his disciples as one of fishing men (Lk 5:10). In fact at least four out of the twelve were undoubtedly fishermen. The leadership of the apostolic college is entrusted to Simon Peter who had been earning his daily bread struggling on the rough sea.

The woman who kneads the dough (Mt 13:35) and sews the torn cloth (Mk 2:21), the mason who builds the house (Lk 6:43-49), the farmer who sows and reaps, the fishermen who cast their nets, the shepherd who tends his flock—all these workers and their toil appear often in the teaching of Jesus, revealing thereby how close they are to his heart. He was aware also of the plight of those who had to earn their bread from daily wages, people who had no possession of the instruments of production. These had to wait at the market places with the hope that some one would hire them, and very often they stood there the whole day in vain (Mt 20:1-16). Familiar with the workers and their hardships Jesus invites them, all to himself: "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). It is true that this saying implies more than physical toil; but the language he uses is remarkable. He does not rally them to a revolutionary uprising, but speaks to their hearts giving them true consolation and confidence. He assures them that God is with them, that God cares for them, and will surely act for their deliverance.

Jesus not only spoke the language of the workers but also was familiar with their sad plight and shared their hardships. He saw their endless and very often futile toil and tormenting anxieties about the future. He did not only move with and speak

to the workers; he himself was a worker in the full sense of the term. He did not cease to be a worker as he took leave of the carpenter's workshop to enter upon the path of a wandering-preacher. The bulk of the gospel material relates his work as the herald of the Kingdom of God. His public ministry, his proclamations as well as his miracles, mark the irruption of a new order into this world. What he ushers in is a transformation of the hearts as well as of the human society, in which the whole material world also participates. The miracles he performed in nature indicate that this transformation has already started. Devastating storms and threatening waters, symbolic of a nature that has turned hostile to man are again brought under control. Stilling the storm and calming the sea are representative of harnessing the forces of nature and bringing there back to the primeval harmony that existed as the world came into being at God's word. This transforming activity is all the more visible in the miraculous healings. The Kingdom of God manifests itself where the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed (Lk 7:22).

Jesus sees the healing of man and of nature in their heart and root as the work that the Father has entrusted him to do, nay, it is the work of the Father Himself in which he participates. "My Father is working still and I am working" (Jn 5:17). Jesus proclaimed, explaining the cure of the paralytic. The man who had been laying at the pool of Bethesda for 38 years is symbolic of the crippled humanity awaiting cure for so long. It is the Good News of the Kingdom that the humanity is freed of its paralysis, that a new creation is already taking place. Water turned into wine overflowing big jars (Jn 2:1-11) and bread multiplied in the desert where an immense crowd of hungerstricken people eat to their fill (Mk 6:42f.) represent the abundance, that is the hallmark of the new creation. Food to the hungry, health to the sick, life to the dead and freedom from all threats—these are the "many good works Jesus has shown from the Father" (Jn 10:32) which "bear witness to him" (Jn 10:25; Lk 7:21f).

It is remarkable that Jesus called his intimate collaborators from among labourers and sent them out with the task of continuing his work: "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:8), demons being the 'code name' for all inimical forces that keep men captives. This task is not exhausted in the

miraculous activities attributed to the apostles, but it comprises the duty of every human being to strive for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Every human endeavour to make this world a home, every honest work that contributes to the perfection and betterment of the living conditions for all, is a participation in the work of Jesus, in the Work of the Father. Labour is not merely an interminable toil for the sustenance of one's own life. As participation in the creative work of God, work and worker are brought to an unimagined dignity. At the same time selfless and earnest work becomes a condition of discipleship and of participation in the kingdom of God. Laziness and parasitism are condemned in severe terms. "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness" (Mt 25:30) is the death sentence that hangs over those who fatten themselves on the fruits of others' work without contributing their share to the common good.

Jesus belonged to the working class, but his life was not dominated by class consciousness which is at the root of all sectarianism. In fact he administered a shock to every self-righteous group by the freedom with which he associated himself with all types of people. He scandalized the pharisees by freely associating himself with publicans and public sinners (Lk 15:2). He offended the zealots by curing the servant of a Roman centurion (Mt 8: 5-13). He shocked the class conscious workers by dining at the house of a rich tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). This is not to say that every one, irrespective of his life and behaviour, is equal before his eyes. The woes he hurls at the rich and exploiters are too plain for any one to be driven to such a conclusion. But the pharisaic attitude of self-righteousness which alienates man from man was an abomination to him, whatever the form in which it appeared.

How did Jesus react to the problem of poverty and social injustice which he was acutely aware of? For one thing, he did not consider the blessedness of life to consist in the accumulation of wealth (Lk 12:15). For him life is not just a matter of production and consumption as contemporary society would have us believe. It does not make a fundamental difference even if one adds the question of distribution to it. In fact he considers it a grave temptation to which man might succumb particularly when he is acutely aware of the problem of hunger (Mt 4:1-4). Therefore he has nothing to say to his followers as to how to produce and

accumulate wealth nor does he teach them techniques of appropriating the property of the rich. He rather warns them of the danger (Jn 6:27; Lk 12:15) and tries to liberate them from their anxiety for tomorrow, asking them to place their trust not in the accumulated wealth but in the providence of the Father (Lk 12:22-30). They must apply their heart and soul to the seeking of the Kingdom of God and its justice (Mt 6:33). It is not to deny that the hungry need food and the naked clothing, and that they have a right to it. But Jesus' attention is turned to something that is more than these primary needs of human beings. In fact, "the Father knows that you need them" (Lk 12:30). But people, be they workers or unemployed, should not become slaves of these.

Jesus did in no way close his eyes upon the enormous injustice that existed in his society. He went to the very root of economic and social injustice. Why is man driven by the urge to accumulate wealth and that at the expense of others? It is the sense of insecurity resulting from their lack of trust in God and then the hunger for power offered by accumulated wealth that drives man relentlessly to the apparently all powerful god Mammon. An approach to the problem of social injustice which confines itself to the analysis of the dominion of one class over another never goes to the heart of the matter and hence the solution conceived in terms of class struggle is doomed to fail as long as man is not liberated from the clutches of mammon. For this reason Jesus makes an all-out attack on man's slavery to money (Lk 12) and thereby opens the way to the liberation of man from social and economic slavery. The essential presupposition of any real liberation of man is a fundamental revolution on the domain of values. This is what Jesus does by announcing the Kingdom of God. Proclaiming "blessed are you poor...woe to you rich" (Lk 6:20-24) he turned the then accepted scale of values upside down. Any society that based on wealth its production and distribution is called into question here. The dignity of man issues not from his wealth but from the fact that he is a child of God. No man, whatever his social position can therefore be reduced to a mere cog in the wheel of production. If this message is taken to heart, it is bound to bring about revolutionary changes in the sphere of man's socio-economic life.

II

If the message Jesus proclaimed through his words and deeds is revolutionizing, even more revolutionary is the fact that the Messiah appeared a carpenter. The Jews who had nurtured their imperialistic dreams of a world dominion under the royal Davidic Messiah, a carpenter from an unknown village in the remote Galilee of the gentiles was a shock they could hardly absorb. To accept the claim of this listless worker would shatter all their hopes and dreams. They might have understood a suffering Messiah because the Servant Songs of Isaiah had paved the way for it. But a carpenter Messiah was unheard-of. It was a scandal, almost a blasphemy. The Nazarenes understood Jesus' claims and they reacted as much as could be. This Jesus, son of Joseph, this carpenter who has worked for us - to be the Messiah for whom God was preparing the glorious people of Israel for almost two thousand years! Only some one out of his senses would accept it. No prophet had ever foretold that the Messiah would be an ordinary worker from Nazareth. This is utter nonsense, they reasoned; and "they took offence at him" (Mk 6:3). A wave of shock went down the spine of official judaism as Jesus the carpenter entered upon his public ministry with the messianic claim. The guardians of faith and the learned interpreters of Torah and prophets could see nothing less than insanity and blasphemy in his assertions. The age-old concept of messianic kingship was turned upside down. A king with a 'kingdom not of this world' (Jn 18:36) has entered this world, revolutionizing the whole concept of power, authority and rule. Though the Infancy Narratives tell the story of his birth at Bethlehem, Jesus is never called a Bethlehemite. 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' (Jn 19:19), reads the official indictment. A Mezziah, divested of all earthly glory and glamour, power and pomp has entered history. A Messiah who earned his bread with the sweat of his brow, a Messiah from the working class, who shares their lot of marginalization - that was the Carpenter from Nazareth.

The shock the carpenter administers does not stop there. Many of the deeds and words of Jesus implied a claim infinitely superior to that of being the Messiah: a claim of being equal to God. What was implied in the deeds and words of the hist

orical Jesus was explicitly confessed by the community of believers in the light of the Easter experience. Furious Christological battles would be fought over centuries before the Church would come to the definition of the two natures united in the one person of the Son of God. Today we have lost all the shock of this claim raised by the carpenter, either because we are too familiar with the trinitarian and christological dogmas or because we do not take the claim seriously any more. But when viewed against the background of the intransigent monotheism of the Jews, championed by valiant prophets, one might be able to sense the horror the pious Jews felt at the claim of Jesus and then of the Christian community.

Ever since the ascendancy of the Davidic monarchy the Jews had come to look upon God as a monarch enthroned in the Holy of Holies and ruling the world from Mount Zion. Though the belief in Yahweh King implied a rejection of every human claim to absolute authority, the kingship of Yahweh, in course of time, came to be conceived after the pattern of the imperial court. For a carpenter from Nazareth to raise the claim to be equal to Yahweh could only be considered supreme arrogance if not diabolic insanity, unless they were ready to revolutionize their concept of God. Many of his contemporaries thought Jesus to be out of his senses or possessed by Satan (Jn 10:20) and his closest relatives set out to take him by force (Mk 3:21). But the theory of blasphemy prevailed over that of insanity (Jn 10:33; Mk 14:64) and the carpenter was nailed to the cross as a blasphemor.

However, all on a sudden a new band of people sprang from among the Jews, mostly of the working class and of the marginalized, repeating with unequivocal clarity and indomitable conviction that this Jesus, executed as a criminal, is the Son of God. They without any scruple lavished upon him all the attributes that were exclusively reserved for Yahweh. Seen from this vantage point of the post-Easter confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Christ the Lord, the fact of his having been an ordinary worker becomes all the more startling. There is little support in the NT for the theory that Jesus became the Messiah and Son of God through his resurrection-exaltation or through the anointing at the baptism. The statement placed in the mouth of Peter by the author of the Acts of the Apostles: "God made him both

Christ and Lord" (Act 2:36) is understood as the enthronement through exaltation rather than making Jesus something which he was not before. Similarly, the declaration at the baptism is God's acknowledgement of the already existing reality of Jesus being the Son; it is not an adoption formula. It is true that the Church came to this full realization only with the Easter-experience. But she confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God right from his birth. There is absolute identity of person between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, between the Carpenter of Nazareth and the exalted Lord. Hence the works of the Messiah cannot be limited to the public ministry. Conceding that with the Jordan experience Jesus enters a new phase in his life, one has to see the preceding work of the carpenter hidden in the anonymity of a workshop in Nazareth as that of the Messiah as well.

This realization would throw new light on the understanding of Jesus' Messiah-Kingship and on the dignity of the work-worker. The affirmation in the Christological hymn of Phil 2:5-11 is helpful here. "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (slave) being born in the likeness of men". The emptying out does not stop at becoming man, but goes on to becoming a slave and to submitting himself to the humiliating death on the cross as a criminal. The Incarnation process leads the Son of God to taking the form of a slave, both in his life as a carpenter and in his death on the cross.

The fourth evangelist has reported a symbolic incident of Jesus' doing the service of a slave to his disciples. "Jesus . . . rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (Jn 13:3-5). The first three actions—rising, laying aside the mantle and girding with a towel—would point to the Incarnation, namely, coming down from the Father, laying aside the glory of the Son and assuming human flesh. The rest of the actions point to the work of a slave. Jesus, who is the eternal Word and Master manifests himself as a slave of his disciples. This action is representative of the whole life of Jesus which was:

not one of lording it over but of service: "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45).

Thus we see that the NT tradition has reinterpreted the Royal Messianic concept in the category of slave-worker-Messiah. The kenotic process leads to the identification of the Son of God with the lowliest and the least. Here we see the 'folly' of God which is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Cor 1:25). It is not by ceasing himself to be the Son that he became Jesus the carpenter. The Christological confession has it that the Son of God assumed flesh and became a servant.

III

Jesus' life as a worker and his attitude towards work and workers teach us a few important lessons. His identification with the working class has paved the way for the Church to tread. Paul expresses the message of Incarnation when he writes to the Christian community at Philippy that they should have the same mind among themselves which was in Christ Jesus who, emptying himself, took the form of a slave (Phil 2:5-7). Jesus has set an example of work and service for the Church to follow (Jn 13:15).

Ever since Jesus the Carpenter imparted the lesson that work is a participation in the creative and redemptive work of God, no honest work can be considered a curse. It is a symbol of dignity and the way to salvation. It is through the patient and painstaking work from day to day that the New Heaven and the New Earth become a reality on the personal as well as on the societal level. The growing tendency to avoid work as much as possible, viewing it as an unpleasant burden, is not commendable. A new attitude of love and respect for every profession that promotes the well-being of all has to be cultivated. Paul's advice to Thessalonians, "if any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess 3:10), would serve as a golden rule.

No emphasis would be too much on the papal teaching that appears persistently during the last decades that work is not a commodity that can be bought and sold at bargain price. Seen through the eyes of the Carpenter from Nazaret, the present trend of class distinction on the basis of the tag of dignity attached to

certain professions finds no justification. No work that contributes to the common good should be considered mean or less dignified. A revision of the attitude towards professions and of the ensuing scale of wages becomes necessary. The trend of social status and hunger for power and prestige and the accompanying luxury and arrogance serve only to degrade workers and widen the gap between people.

The rights of every worker has to be respected and upheld. But an overconsciousness of one's own rights often leads to the denial of the rights of others. The socio-economic systems that widen the division of people into classes and advocate the dominion of one class over the other stand condemned by Jesus' life and attitudes. The Kingdom of God will not be made a reality on the socio-economic plain through hatred and class war, but through a harmonious collaboration of brain and muscle, of planning and execution. Only when the 'all powerful mammon' is dethroned will the rights of all be guaranteed.

It is unfortunate that the secular attitude towards work and workers has infested also the ecclesial community. Starting with "Rerum Novarum" quite a number of encyclicals, pastorals and other official pronouncements have been issued by the magisterium, upholding the dignity, rights and duties of the workers as well as the place of work in the plan of salvation. But these often remain dead letters on sheet of paper when the church officials and managers come to deal with workers employed by them. The followers of the Carpenter, in fact, are afraid of the working class when these are found in their own institutions. It would seem that the official declarations come from the desk of the owners and employers, rather than from the workshop of the labourers, that is to say, the official Church looks from the side of the management. A comparison of the style and concerns of these documents with the language of Jesus would substantiate this affirmation.

The 'Carpenter Christology' would serve as a corrective to the triumphalism that invaded the Church in the wake of the exaltation Christologies. The fact that the Son of God chose to appear as a slave and carpenter should be taken seriously in the search for the true face of Christ. This would have serious imple-

cations as far as the life style of the followers of Jesus are concerned. The process of Incarnation was the process of God's identification with the weak, the lowly, the marginalized. Hence the vocation to be a christian implies the challenge to undertake this kenotic process of identification. Christians are supposed to be the disciples of Jesus who put aside the mantle of glory and girded himself with the towel of a slave. But ever since Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, christians succumb to the temptation of laying aside the towel and putting nothe mantle. This tendency is the more conspicuous the higher one moves on the steps of the hierarchy. The vicar of the one who knelt before the fishermen and washed their feet found no incongruency in letting others kneel before him and kiss his feet. The feet washing ceremony still practised on Maundy-Thursday with great ostentation, though it serves as a reminder, makes a mockery of the self-effacing action of Jesus that was representative of his whole life and attitude. In a country like India, where over three hundred million half-starved human beings struggle for survival the posh church establishments and the luxurious life style become a glaring contradiction. The contradiction assumes frightening proportions when one becomes aware of the fact that this royal luxury is enjoyed at the expense of the simple workers.

For certain, we had been witnessing a gradual disincarnation process of the Christian community, which slowly left aside the values Jesus preached and lived by, absorbing more and more the values of the world. It was a long march farther and farther away from the roots and origins. Instead of being the follower of Jesus, Son of God and Carpenter of Nazareth they imitated emperors and caesars. Gradually triumphalism became the order of the day and a matter of faith. What Jesus repudiated as temptation and decried as hypocrisy has been whole heartedly accepted and enforced by law. The moment one discarded the carpenter's hammer and chisels and reached out to the Caesar's sceptre and crown, the great fall started. Today we have traversed such a great distance in this triumphant march that the young worker of Nazareth looks a lien to us. As a result youth and working class are progressively being alienated from the Church. No wonder if these stray into enemy camps and become victims of ideologies that promise them paradise on earth through class struggle. No amount of proclamations and threats

would stop this alienation unless substantial change imadein these concrete praxis of the Church.

It is however promising that starting with Pope John XXIII a fresh and sincere soul-search has begun. Feet kissing is gone; the tiara has been laid aside with many other royal paraphernalia, though hand kissing, mitre and many of the feudalistic accompniments still remain. Awareness of the rights of the workers find ever stronger expression in official proclamations. In order to rediscover the Jesus of history, the manifestation of the Word of God in flesh, and to reinstate the Christian faith to its pristine purity, the Church as a whole, the leaders and the followers alike, will have to get back to the workshop at Nazareth and relearn the lessons of work and service through identification with Jesus the Carpenter.

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“To Cultivate and Guard Eden” (Gen 2:15): Reflections on a Biblical Theology of Work

The climax of the Paradise story in Gen. 3 is the punishment meted out by God to the Man and to the Woman. Man is the farmer and the woman is house-wife. Man is spoken to in terms of his field of work: “Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you. It will produce weeds and thorns, and you will have to eat wild plants. You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything until you go back to the soil from which you were formed. You were made from soil, and you will become soil again.” (Gen 3:17-19)

To one reading this passage, work in any form would appear to be nothing more than a punishment, a form of curse befallen us. If so one could be happy if one could manage without working; at least if one could do the minimum. At the same time everyone goes on working because otherwise the society and the individuals will find it difficult to survive. Moreover, the example of those individuals and society which work hard and thereby prosper give an inspiration to others as well to work hard and improve their living condition. It is also to be noted that by instinct everyone would like to make his living and earn his livelihood through his own work not only because it is a biological instinct but also because it is a matter of self-respect everyone has about himself. But it seems that more than a question of instinct and self-respect there are several theological issues contained in this and the purpose of this study is to highlight some of these issues.

The Genesis perspective of Man and his Work

We have two passages about the role and significance of work in the Genesis narrative, one in the Priestly Narrative (Gen 1:26-31) and the other in the Yahwist Narrative (Gen 2:15). An analysis of these two passages is very important for understanding their theological meaning. In Gen 1:26-31 we have an approach to creation as a hierarchy at the summit of which stands mankind with its image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God. It is given the charge of exercising dominion over the creation. A specific task of this dominion is to "bring the earth under its control" (v. 28). There has been a lot of discussion among Bible scholars about the meaning of the "image and likeness" of God in man. It is becoming more and more clear that these two are not abstract, ontological qualities, but are rather functional ones in relation to man's role in creation. The most important role he has to play is to "bring the earth under his control". It is not a question of destroying it, nor is it one of keeping it as it is. The whole material creation needs to undergo a process of training and formation which only mankind can take care of. As a creature directly created by God with a specific purpose it is his duty to control the material creation in a way determined by God. For this he has to be a representative of God and continue to exercise his creative power on the creation as a whole. The author does not say in what this

dominion consists; but his faith in the greatness of man enabled him to voice this note of hope and mission.

The second reference to man's mission is more concrete and dramatic. The Yahwist speaks about God as creating man from the soil taken from the ground, breathing into his nostrils the life-giving breath and making him a living being. The man thus created is placed in the garden in Eden to cultivate it and guard it (Gen 2:7-15). It is true that it is not correct to give a literal interpretation to this passage. It is rather a symbolic narrative presented in mythological language to give expression to the sublime responsibility man was given at the beginning of creation. Man's task is to cultivate the garden and keep it. It is not enough for him to be a supervisor and observer; he has to be personally involved in the well-being of the garden. He has to cultivate it and make it grow. He can enjoy it, but it must be a responsible enjoyment after he has worked in it. The traditional picture of Adam in Paradise as enjoying it as if he were in a five-star hotel is not all correct. He was a farmer, part and parcel of the ground he was taken from. He had to work in it, keep it and make it grow.

But the moment we start reading the reversal of the Paradise bliss through the fall narrative of Genesis 3, the meaning and nature of work assumes a new dimension. Work becomes a curse, not insofar as man has to work, but insofar as there is no proportion between the work and the fruit of the work. The ground will be under a curse. Man has to work hard to make the earth produce enough food. It will produce weeds and thorns. Man has to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything until he goes back to the soil from which he was formed (cf. Gen 3:17-19). Traditionally it is this picture of work as a punishment that has been handed down in Christian theology. This approach coupled with the basic reality of man's selfishness and laziness resulted in a wrong attitude towards work and it took time for theologians to develop a theology of work with its accent on man's greatness and creativity.

Sin as Carelessness and the Meaning of Work

In this connection it is important for us to have a look at the basic reality of man's nature as characterized by carelessness

and laziness, and work as the conscious exercise of man's creative power to overcome this attitude. According to many modern theologians, the sin of humanity was not so much the violation of a positive law as the conscious betrayal of manhood as entrusted to humanity. Whereas mankind was entrusted with the task of exercising dominion over the creation and of cultivating and keeping the garden, it conveniently neglected this task and took refuge in the easy way of becoming great through the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Humanity was given the task of ruling the material creation; but instead of that it gave heed to a creature, the serpent, the most cunning creature God created. Consequently the first sin was a lack of man's responsibility about himself, about his task in the world. The world that God created in view of its growth and perfection man forfeited through his carelessness and indifference. Consequently the later approach to work assumes rather the nature of punishment and suffering than the exercise of man's creative power. It is this tragedy that the Yahwist is illustrating through the imagery of the punishment meted out to the first man.

It is against the background of these ideas that we have to analyse the whole theology of work whether it be in the Old Testament or the New Testament. The people of Israel as a whole approached the reality of work as something sacred. It is true that they had to experience the hardships of bonded labour in Egypt and the sacred authors found this to be a humiliating experience for the people of God. At the same time it is important to note that the people of Israel were very hard-working and industrious, courageous enough to face difficulties and hardships. The very process of the exodus from Egypt is not only a saga of God's marvellous acts in favour of a people, but also a manifestation of courage and determination that characterized the people of Israel and their leader, Moses. The conquest of Canaan and the process of settling down in the promised land was also a proof of Israel's commitment to achieve a goal and also of working hard to arrive at that goal.

Jesus the worker

The tradition of a people committed to work hard was precisely the characteristic of Jesus, whose public ministry is presented

by Mark as a series of actions taking place one after the other. The frequent use of "immediately" (*euthys*) is a characteristic note of this Evangelist, especially in the early chapters of his Gospel. The implied idea is that Jesus worked hard to fulfil his mission. We know practically nothing about the early childhood of Jesus, nor about his life till about the age of thirty (cf. Lk 3:23). But the passing reference to his father as a carpenter (Mt 13:55) or himself as a carpenter (Mk 6:3) reveals the fact that till his public ministry Jesus was a carpenter and that he earned his livelihood through his carpentry.

The Gospels are good news and any attempt to look for biography in them is doomed to failure. But it is equally true that the entire good news of the Gospels is centered around the deeds and words of the historical Jesus. The Evangelists present him as one who was conscious of his mission, who dedicated himself totally to his task and this he did going from one place to another.

He exhorted his disciples to work hard and lead a simple life (Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-12). They had to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God and thereby build up a community of people living in freedom, peace and harmony. It is not correct to think of the mission of the apostles exclusively in terms of a spiritual message to be given. Their mission was at the same time spiritual and secular. They had to heal the sick, preach the good news of the Kingdom and effect a new community devoid of suffering and pain. Salvation as understood by the Evangelists is something affecting the total well-being of men and women.

Paul, a model of worker

It is against the background of this understanding of apostolic ministry that we have to evaluate the attitude Paul took towards work. He did not belong to the category of people who considered apostolic ministry as a privilege in view of sitting on thrones and ruling the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Mt 19:28-29). Rather he was a tent-maker and it seems that he earned his livelihood through this trade (Acts 18:1-3). In Acts 20:34-35 we have Paul speaking to the Elders of Ephesus explaining to them how he worked hard with his hands and provided everything

that his companion and he had needed. Then Paul goes on to say: "I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (v. 35). It is quite likely that Paul was also helping the needy Christians with what he could earn. In Thessalonica also he was working day and night so that he would not be a trouble to that community (1 Thes 2:9). In fact, this practice on his part gave him the confidence and the courage to exhort the community at Thessalonica to hard work. "We command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to keep away from all brothers who are living a lazy life and who do not follow the instructions that we gave them. You yourselves know very well that you should do just what we did. We were not lazy when we were with you. We did not accept anyone's support without paying for it. Instead, we worked and toiled; we kept working night and day so as not to be an expense to any of you. We did this, not because we have no right to demand our support; we did it to be an example for you to follow. While we were with you, we used to say to you: 'Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat' (2 Thes. 3:6-10).

The significance of Paul in the early Church is not only on account of his high theological genius, but also because of his sound and systematic approach to the various aspects of life. Among them work occupies a very important role. On the one hand he himself worked hard to earn his livelihood; on the other hand he wanted the Christians to work and not to be lazy. It is beyond the scope of this study to go to the details of Paul's life as a tent-worker. But one point stands out as important. Paul had his self-respect as a basic quality of his personality. He never wanted to be a parasite. He never allowed others to criticize him saying that he depended on others. A Christian is one who should have a lot of self-respect. To be the member of a community means that he should be a healthy and fruitful member of the community. It is the duty of every Christian to contribute towards the growth of the community, rather than be a consumer.

The Thessalonian Crisis

In this connection it may be of interest to know how a critical situation arose in the Church of Thessalonica, which could

have had far-reaching consequences. Paul had referred to the parousia of Christ as something imminent and a few took advantage of this doctrine to become dis-interested in this world and encourage others to become so. At the same time, they had to eat, so they went from house to house circulating news about the parousia and eating from there. Paul had to be serious about it. On the one hand, the whole thing was based on a false news that Paul had written to them; on the other hand, Paul never wanted Christians to become lazy under the pretext of an imminent parousia. We have seen above Paul's reaction to this situation. What is implied in this is the misunderstanding that Christian life is an invitation to passivity and inaction.

The Church in general throughout the centuries had been a victim of this passivity and inaction. The preoccupation with a spiritual salvation resulted in a general indifference to material progress and this in turn perpetuated the concept of work as a punishment for sin. It is only in these last few decades that theologians are once again emphasizing the meaning of work. In this the theology of secularization has played an active role. We once again became aware of the positive meaning of the material creation, the same meaning given to it by the Hebrew authors of Genesis. Material progress is being seen as part of the human progress and as such it is understood in relation to the integral liberation and salvation of man.

It is the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World that came forward with a positive look at material progress. Once again man became the centre of the cosmos. His dignity and freedom became the preoccupation of the Church. Human activity is interpreted as willed and planned by God: "Man, created in God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness, a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all." (GS 34) The most pertinent passage is the following: Far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design. For the greater man's power

becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. Hence it is clear that men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these very things." (GS 34)

It is true that human activity in the present order of things is infected by sin; at the same time it is equally true that the same human activity is redeemed and transformed by the paschal mystery. Christ's death and resurrection and the continued operation of the Holy Spirit have set in motion a new way of looking at human activity. Consequently human activity is no more the natural one, rather it belongs to the redeemed order. The Spirit of the Risen Christ inspires all to dedicate themselves to this task.

Theological Conclusions

The above analysis has shown that our attitude towards work has to receive a new emphasis, especially in our times. Even the theology of the Sunday rest has to be reinterpreted in the light of the culture and customs of the society. The most important point is that we have to get rid of the idea that sin and work are related insofar as work is the punishment for sin. There could be an aspect in this that is correct, but to evaluate the entire reality of work as a punishment for sin is theologically wrong. It is the opposite picture that is given by the early chapters of Genesis.

It seems that the Indian situation is only promoting a negative attitude towards work. On the one hand there is the traditional attitude towards *karma* as a way of salvation, but at the same time there is a negative approach to *karma* as something resulting from sin and impurity. Consequently *karma* is proposed as a means of purification, according to which *nishkama karma* is the ideal proposed. Besides this philosophical approach there is the tremendous problem of unemployment in this country and it is practically impossible to propose a theology of work in a situation where there is either no work or there is no proportion between the work and its remuneration. It is almost impossible to tell the people about the beauty of work where it is a threat and misery.

It is against the background of these real problems that we have to propose a biblical theology of work to our people. At the

same time, the lack of prosperity and development this country is undergoing is to a great extent due to the traditional attitude we have inherited according to which 'work' was something reserved for the lowest caste of the society. We are slowly coming out of that social bias and the sooner we get out of it, the better will it be. No society can grow unless it is committed to work hard and no progress is made until and unless individuals and society become aware of this grave task and responsibility.

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The World of Workers

a. Exploited and Duped

I have before me a socio-economic survey of Sagbara and Dediapada, two tribal talukas of Broach District in Gujarat. The income of an average tribal worker in the two talukas amounts to approximately Rs. 36/- per month. The paltry sum is less than half of the amount spent on cigarettes by some of my friends every month. It is less than what some others spend every month on their toilet alone. To earn that small amount the tribal has to put in six to eight hours of work in the scorching sun or the biting cold. It is by a veritable daily struggle that workers can keep the thin thread that links them to life from snapping.

A very lucrative and flourishing business in India is the exploitation of unorganised casual labourers. In Nandod taluka of Rajpipla Subdivision there are two dams currently under construction: one on the river Narmada which is a multi-crore project; and the other a smaller one, on the river Karjan. Approximately 150,000 workers are expected to be at work when the construction activities reach their peak. A few thousands are

already at work as the construction activities are gaining momentum. There are more than enough local labourers available in Bharuch District and neighbourhood for work including those tribals who are losing their lands to the project. But the local labourers are frequently not called for work. Labourers from outside are preferred. They are brought from Maharashtra, Rajasthan Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

One can see groups of workers leaving their work sites for good, disappointed and disillusioned. They had come with high expectations. They had been promised attractive wages and good living conditions with housing, water, medical care and other facilities. A month or two of hard work, the meagre wages received and the broken promises of their employers shatter their hopes and awaken them to their harsh plight and their helplessness. They pick up their earthen pots and pans and shreds of clothing and prepare to leave. Rarely would they raise their voices against their exploiters in the strange work sites where they have no friends or acquaintances. Even when help is offered, they are in no position to discern who is a friend to be trusted, and who an enemy to be shunned. They have no one to complain to. They leave without a word and trek in silence as in a funeral procession. The employers succeed in delaying their departure by withholding the wages and advancing only small sums to buy something to eat. The workers hold on for some weeks before realism forces open their eyes. Once the truth dawns on them they resolutely get up and begin their long trek back to their homes. They consider themselves lucky if they get some work on their way and can earn a few rupees.

In giving contracts to construction companies the government takes into consideration among other things the man days and wages to be paid to labourers. Minimum Wages Act and more are taken into account in calculating the wages. The amount swindled by contractors by paying wages below the minimum may add up to several lakhs of rupees everyday in the Narmada and Karjan projects. In the year 1982 the Gujarat Government raised the minimum wages by an Act, to every one's surprise, because there were no elections round the corner, and the labourers were not asking for more, and the existing wage provisions were not being implemented. The new Act was therefore seen by many

as a cover for fabulous sums paid to contractors from whom large donations were collected by political parties, or certain politicians.

Things do not improve even when daily wage labourers wishing to redress their grievances approach trade unions. Amar-sigh Vasava had been working for an year and a half in a factory in Ankleswar, manufacturing colours. The fumes in the factory damaged his lungs, he found it difficult to breathe, refused to work overtime, and was retrenched. The factory did not pay him the final month's salary, Rs. 210.50, which was due. A Trade Union, Akhil Gujarat Kamdar Association, promised to help him to move the labour court. He has so far had to report to their office and the labour court 15 times, at a total cost of Rs. 450. The case is still pending in the labour court.

One of the ways in which contractors and employers avoid paying minimum wages fixed by law is the adoption of piece rates. The illiterate persons are unable to understand the terms of measures like a cubic metre or a truck load when they agree to accept a fixed amount of money for a fixed amount of work. A truck may be small or big and the labourers have little idea of the labour involved in filling a truck until the work is over. Similarly digging out a cubic metre of mud, or soft stones or of hard stones makes a world of difference. The workers realize the difference only when the work is in progress after contract has been made. "We have to take what we get. If we do not take the work offered to us, how shall we eat"?

The piece-rate system is singularly suited to avoid the obligations of employers like giving minimum wages to labours. It also makes supervision of workers superfluous. All that the employers have to do is to measure the amount of work and cut certain amounts for any defect in the work done. Frequently, workers toil from 7 in the morning till 7 in the evening, with a brief break for lunch. The remuneration they get when measurements are taken is Rs. 3/- or 4/- per day per person.

Not all the contractors are satisfied with having duped the workers into agreements disadvantageous to the workers. Some go further to cheat the workers in measuring work done and calculating wages due. Ultimately the contractor pays what he pleases, the more

greedy and callous giving next to nothing and the others giving just enough to enable the labourers to keep their body and soul together.

For some contractors it does not make the slightest difference if the workers live or die of hunger. If some workers die, India is such a vast populous country, contractors can always find plenty of substitutes. When a group of workers from Maharashtra, working for a contractor supplying stones to the Karjan Project, wished to go home to celebrate Deevali festival, they were not given the money due to them despite their persistent request. Finally they left without sufficient busfare, in the hope that some kindly truck-driver would help them reach home and receive his dues on arrival.

It is seldom that the workers get the wages at the end of each day. Payment is normally made every week, or every two weeks or at times at the end of each month. Not rarely are workers made to walk many times to the cashier's office only to be told that the relevant papers have not reached him. I met several work gangs who had lost four man days or more walking to and fro to get their pay.

When the workers are lucky to get some payment, they invariably spend a day in the market place. They make inquiries from fellow villagers about the prices, of essential items, cereals, jagiri, edible oil, pulses etc. If they learn that a trader far away sells things at a lower price, they walk long distances to save what little they can that way. But often the traders are not very different from the contractors in exploiting ignorant workers. To give an example, a trader who settled down in a village in Nandod taluka took all the metal vessels of workers as pawn for insignificant sums of money he had lent. When there were no more vessels left in that village he packed up and moved to the next village from which also he moved out after two years of flourishing business.

Many workers are unable to read and write. But literacy is no guarantee against traders' tricks. The very workers who can recount quite a number of instances in which traders have misappropriated their belongings easily fall to traders' charms, soft speech, gifts, of beedies or tea. Some traders sell grains, salt edible oil, spices etc. on credit, retaining certain document

or other valuables as security. A hundred and fifty percent interest on loans per annum is rather low in Nandod taluka not withstanding the moneylenders' act, 300 % interests being the more common. As soon as it is clear that a worker cannot readily raise the money he owes all of a sudden, the trader starts harassing him for full payment, and compels him to sign some document parting with whatever belongings he might have. Land, bullocks, cows, goats, ornaments, metal utensils, house or any other valuable of the worker are grabbed in this way by the trader. The brutality and violence of the trader against the worker are in direct proportion to the submissiveness or manifest weakness of the worker. Should the worker resolutely defy and resist all attempts to beat him down, the trader normally backs away like a timid dog. It is seldom that a worker would defy a trader as the latter knows his business too well and picks his prey selecting the weakest and most vulnerable. Unscrupulous traders use some degenerate workers to bully those who are indebted to them.

After the various exploiters have done their job, mighty little may be left for the workers to live on. Indeed the workers scarcely "live"; theirs is an experience of 'dying'. In village after village one meets people grown pre-maturely old, looking decrepit at the age of 50. In their forties their skin wrinkles, teeth fall and legs falter. Life expectancy is forty years, fifty being the very maximum.

Rajpipla, Gujarat

Mathew Kalathil

b. Work and the Warli

For the Warli, work is synonymous with survival. In ordinary conversation, when referring to the regular migration of labour to the salt pans, brick kilns and sand dredgers, the Warli will say *zagayala zane*, "go and survive". After six to eight months of hard labour of ten to twelve hours each day, when the whole family comes back, the Warli is content because he/she has survived the season though with little earning none at all. They went to

survive and have returned. They have a vague understanding of themselves as wage-labour. They try a little to explore the dimensions of wage-labour-capital relationship. But they do not fully grasp the productive aspect of their work: the immense contribution they make to the creation of goods and services; the generation of enormous profit for the owner; the unfair returns for their own labour; the endless drudgery that is their lot. They go to "survive" and find a place where they can earn that survival, and do what is necessary to earn it, however hard and burdensome the toil. They are happy to return alive and safe.

They work not to generate any surplus for themselves, not to amass wealth, but to satisfy basic needs. They go to work in order to pay off a debt, the consumption loan taken from their 'employer' in order to survive during the lean months of the monsoons. They do not look at the exploitative nature of the loan, do not see that it is a form of debt-bondage. They see their work as fulfilment of their part of a contract made with the landlord or labour contractor or sand-dredge owner or truck owner. The contract is heavily weighed in favour of the lender. But it is a contract which has ensured the Warli's survival against starvation. They must therefore fulfil it. Had they taken no loan during the monsoon and remained 'free labour', they could go where their expended energy would be better paid for. They expect the other party to fulfil their part of the contract, and yet they lay claim to nothing beyond what is given. Claims are made and questions raised only by the few Warlis who have an awakened or politicised awareness.

A parallel situation exists when they work on their own lands during the monsoons. Work then is their part of the unspoken contract made with nature. It is their duty to till the ground, plant the seed and transplant. Nature, the rain and sunshine, are expected to fulfil their part of the contract. Warlis have a rhythm and pace of work all their own except when they are forced by employers or by the vagaries of nature. Domestic animals like the bulls that plough are looked on as collaborators and not as beasts of burden. The Warlis do not drive them, but follow their pace. But they themselves are driven like beasts of burden by the landlords and the rich farmers in whose fields work is completed on time with Warli labour while the Waris' own fields and crops remain unattended to.

Once, in the jungles where they lived, work consisted of food gathering and hunting. Then they migrated to the plains where primitive cultivation and migratory labour follow each other in an endless cycle. They are accustomed to this change of work environment, but not to forced schedules of regular work. They love to relax when their limited needs are met, for they work to live and live to work. Hence at the earliest opportunity they revolt against strict regimen. The attraction of material gain is rarely strong enough to force a Warli to a regulated pattern of slogging. For after all man cannot take his material possessions along when he goes to the grave.

On the other hand the Warlis' capacity for work is enormous. They are able to go on working steadily in conditions in which average men and women would give up. The physical resilience of these primitives is astonishing. When observing their work pace, the stranger is prone to qualify them as lazy, but to maintain the same level of physical exertion on a similar diet would be difficult. Work is no stranger to Warlis. As one woman put it, "We are born old and we die young". The Warli child begins at the age of five as a baby sister; becomes a cowherd at seven or eight, and in its teens is already part of the agricultural workforce. The men enjoy more leisure. The key motions of ploughing and thrashing are their right and a mark of their superiority over women. The women are the beast of burden. In addition to an equal if not greater share of outdoor work, the women do all the work at home. The bride price paid by the man at the time of marriage is seen as the price of an extra hand. Most women never question this state of affairs, they fit into the endless cycle of work which begins at cock-crow and ends late at night. The work of women is also part of the struggle for survival.

For the Warli, life in the jungle meant sharing in nature's bounty. Transition to primitive agriculture helped them develop a sense of partnership with the earth. Labour in the field merges with creativity and issues into celebration in song and dance. Man and nature are partners in life, and there exists no difference between labour and leisure. The Warlis take the same concept of partnership and equality to the brick kilns and salt pans. There they become victims of owner-employers' greed for profit and plans to live off the workers' toil. They are methodically exploited and their

life and energy expropriated. They seem to bear it all with stoic calm, but that is no sign of defeat. The silence is a mark of adivasi resilience. As the consciousness of the alienation of their labour grows, they also brace themselves for the struggle not just for survival but for dignity and justice. They accept the challenge of restoring to labour its creativity, equality and worth. The awakening of the labourer means the re-establishment of the value of work.

Pradeep D. Prabhu

c. Coolie, Cobbler, Mechanic

You ask me to write something about my work-experience. I shall try. When I think of work, an old saying comes to my mind: 'To work is to worship'. Personally I do not take it that way. Work is part of my life. I believe in work and in it I find my balance. When what I do is the kind of work I like, work is real recreation. But there are times when work is felt as a burden. That is, when one works only for money; or rather, when one is forced to work to earn one's bread. Here the choice is not personal, and work ceases to be a joy. I have passed, so to speak, through two different levels or stages of experience.

In the first part of my life as a worker, my heart was not in what I was doing. I experienced then how heavy life could be when one had to do the kind of work which did not suit one. For sometime I worked as a coolie in construction work. The work was physically taxing. But far worse was the scolding I had to take from those who bossed over me though most of them were younger to me in age. They did not like the way I worked. I felt deeply humiliated. This was far more exhausting than the hard physical toil. Few of my companions were happy to slave away as coolies. The most painful factor in the situation was the insecurity in which it placed our families. There is another factor, equally hurting, especially on the Indian scene. Here a human being's personal worth and name are bound up with the type of

work one is doing. I felt this social stigma strongly when I worked as a cobbler. It is in the villages that the discrimination is most keenly felt, though the situation in the towns is not much better. A cobbler may not eat or sleep in the part of the village where upper caste people live. A cobbler is not pure enough; his birth is not pure. But someone not born in a cobbler family but works as a shoemaker is also shunned as unclean. The work is considered contaminating. However, the pain and the humiliation of it all take on a different quality and becomes bearable when the work is chosen and done for love of somebody. The social shame is nothing when I think of Jesus who was much more humiliated than I am.

Now I work as a mechanic. As this work responds to my taste, talent and training, it is no burden to me. It gives relaxation to my mind though physically it is demanding like any other work. I find my balance in it and at the end of the day I feel satisfied to see the result or progress of my work.

An important reality which I discovered as a worker is my relation with my co-workers. I am sure that it is not through books and studies that one discovers the hard realities of life, of the life, for instance, of a man who has to maintain a family of four or more children. I wonder how I would manage or react if I were in his position. Work brings us close to co-workers and gives us an intimate sense of the reality of their life and their situation. To some work is a diversion from the cares and miseries of life. Most people work in order to meet needs, with the hope that one day relief will come when there will be enough wealth, or when the children will take the place of the ageing. Work is accompanied by the hope of a peaceful old age, and the sense of life moving towards its close.

As unemployment grows and jobs become scarce in India and other parts of the world, people are forced to do kinds of work in which they have little interest. People then begin to work like machines. Work must fit into the life of man, and not

the other way round. For a balanced life we need something more than mere work. I work because I want to earn my bread; and because I want to have personal, real experience of the life of working class people; and above all because I want to do God's will for me day after day.

Bangalore

Brother Peter

d. With Jesus

Brother Charles (de Foucauld) saw clearly that his brothers should, in a special way, follow the Lord Jesus in his life in Nazareth. They should do manual work, lead a life of poverty become one with the working class and the poor sectors of society. This is to be done out of love for Jesus.

Brother Charles assimilated this search for poverty and humility to the movement of the "kenosis" of the Son of God who became the least among us. He called this the "abjection" of Jesus. With Jesus the little brothers and sisters are also searching to live 'the last place' among their fellow human beings. It is in this context that they do manual work.

The following is brother Charles' meditation on Mark 6:1-6, the rejection of Jesus the carpenter by the people of his home town:

"Let us throw ourselves into the abjection, the poverty, the humble manual work of our Lord. Jesus asks us to follow him. Let us follow him, sharing his life, his work, his occupations, his poverty, his abjection; let us be workers, poor workers, despised like him 'I came to save the world'. We have the same aim. We too must work for the salvation of all humankind. Let us use the very means used by Jesus himself. Jesus did not come with human wisdom, surrounded by pomp and riches, and sitting in the first place. No, he used the divine wisdom, hidden under the appearance of a poor man, a man earning his life from the work

of his hands. Not a wise man of science, but a poor man who never studied in the schools of men; a poor worker doing humble work; one of the workers."

The rule of life of the little brothers says: To feed himself and his mother. Jesus spent the greater part of his life doing manual work. It is the same with the poor people. It will be the same for the little brothers. Manual work will become your main activity. Manual work is for the brothers, as it was for Jesus and his family, the normal way of earning their livelihood. There is a close link between manual work and poverty. To live day by day without capital and savings is the only way of life belitting a man who wants to be poor. The way of life of the manual worker must be taken with all its social consequences, so that the community becomes, in truth and because of the work of the brothers, part of the world of the working class. Manual work is integral to witnessing to the Gospel. Poverty and manual work are the best way of showing that the witness to the Gospel does not seek for personal profit. Saint Paul realized this. For a little brother manual work is closely linked to his mission of being a witness to the Lord and his Gospel in the midst of people. Manual work is a service to the community. That is the root of the dignity of the worker in society. It is also a very powerful means to create strong and permanent relationships between people. A little brother should be aware of this double character of work, and be proud of his work, and insert himself through his work in the world of workers,

Work is also an act of obedience to the law of God imposed on man. It is a vital activity allowing man to reach perfection. For humankind redeemed by Christ, work is matter most apt to be offered to the Lord, so that the free offering of the hardship and suffering which goes with work is, in the plan of God, a privileged means of redemption for every man.

Karma: Work for Liberation and Means of Bondage: towards a Hindu Theology of Work

1. Enough has been written about Nishkama-karma and more than enough about Karma-and-Punarjanma. What seems to me to have suffered singular neglect is the cosmic aspect of Karma. For without it the real nature and function of both Nishkama-karma and Karma-and-Punarjanma cannot be understood satisfactorily. Indeed, the fact that Nishkama-Karma appears so stoic and Karmae and-Punarjanma so stupid is to be attributed to the circumstance that the holistic understanding of Karma has been either overlooked or neglected. Today, unfortunately, Nishkama-karma is being interpreted moralistically and Punarjanma physically (i.e. literally) whereas they were by their very nature expressions of a *religious experience*, metaphors pregnant with religious Significance.

2. We have therefore first of all to ask ourselves whether Karma-and-Punarjanma belong to the realm of mere information. That is, may we understand them *literally*? Are they meant to convey some information about the realm of space-time, namely, that all our deeds and thoughts determine in a physical way the course of our lives but in such a way that we shall be born again physically? If Karma-and-Punarjanma belong to the sphere of information, then they should be verifiable or falsifiable; that is, they should be conveying information that can be understood literally, like any other kind of information. In other words Karma-and-Punarjanma have to be considered part of the "physical" aspect of our lives. They would in that case not belong to the "religious" side of our lives. Eating, drinking, sleeping, for example, are not normally considered to be religious exercise. In that sense Karma-and-Punarjanma too could not be considered as belonging to the religious aspect of our lives.

Whenever we understand a sentence literally, we can safely generalize and state that it is imparting information and that such information necessarily belongs to the realm of space-time. If

Karmn-and-Pnnarjanma are to be explained literally then we are forced to conclude that they firmly belong to the informative aspect of our lives.

On the other hand it is also a fact that they are considered to be a consequence of our moral and irreligious deeds; and moral deeds have to do not merely with physical actions but also with intentions and attitude that are beyond the realm of physical actions. The morality of actions (whether physical or mental) is constituted by the intention with which they are performed. This intention cannot be understood literally. It belongs to a realm which is not identical with that of space-time. Actions belong to the realm of space-time but their morality is irreducible to space-time categories. Because of this we cannot speak of morality; we speak of space-time happenings. The language of morals, like the language of religion, has to be interpreted, not explained. For explanations belong to categories of space-time but moral and religious concepts cannot be explained since they are not reducible to space-time categories. Hence they have to be interpreted.

Explanation is built on terms which have fixed meanings but interpretation consists of words which go beyond fixed meanings. When we speak of the bad and the good, the list of actions that can be classified as good or bad is endless. For the same action (seen externally) could be sometimes said to be good and sometimes bad. There is no one action which can be simply identified with the good or the bad. For moral concepts cannot be reduced to fixed terms. Hence they need to be interpreted. What is good in one set of circumstances need not be good in another. Hence the good or the bad has to be interpreted according to the circumstances. It can in no case be totally identified with any one particular interpretation.

In the case of informative language however the meaning has to be fully identified with the particular explanation, if it is to be intelligible to others. Hence if "birth" is spoken of on the level of information, then it undoubtedly refers to "physical" birth. If Punarjanma is mentioned as information then it refers to physical birth. If this is so then it becomes difficult to understand how the morality (and not the physicality) of our actions can cause "physical" re-birth! It would be easier to understand that re-birth has to do

with the laws of physics and not with either morals or religions; but how does one explain re-birth as being conditioned by the morality of our actions?

If Punarjanma is somehow connected with religious experience then it can by no means be interpreted purely as physical birth. True, in order to understand it in a primary way, we first have to know the "physical" meanings of the expression. But it surely means more than the sum of the literal meanings that make up the expression. But the literal meaning can never exhaust the total meaning that birth can refer to. Though we begin with the literal meaning we cannot limit ourselves to it. Our experience of birth refers to much more than its literal meaning and hence though we speak about birth we *mean* more than physical birth.

The reason for this is that "birth" is in fact a much larger reality than just physical birth. This is true of all the expressions referring to the primary needs of our life. We begin with their physical expressions (warm, cold, hungry, etc.) and then realize that there are other areas of our experience which are covered by these expressions. Once we have acquainted ourselves with the literal meaning we gradually begin to discover the larger reality the literal meaning points to. It is the literal meaning that points to the larger reality. That is why it is not possible to speak of the larger reality without the literal meaning. Thus when we speak of the larger reality we expressly intend to activate the pointer-function of the literal meaning. We speak of physical birth but mean the larger reality of birth!

This is not at all surprising since our lives are not limited to or by merely the practical concerns of everyday life. We have needs which go beyond these. Now our language is capable of expressing both the physical as well as the higher aspects of our experience. Language makes use of the informative function to point to its transformative function. Hence the informative function is extremely important. This however should not lead us to the false conclusion that the transformative function is to be evaluated by the informative function. Each has its own specific nature and task. Whereas the informative function is circumscribed by fixed meanings, the transformative function leads towards evoking various experiences of Significance.

The larger reality of bread (expressed by the metaphor of bread of life) is not a new kind of physical bread however. Rather it refers to the new experience of Significance that is evoked in us through the metaphor. Bread begins to mean more in the sense that, though its "externals" remain the same, it is somehow more meaningful. We see in bread not just the end product from the bakery but the means and medium of communion between God, Man and the cosmos. It is some such experience of transformation that the metaphor intends to convey and evoke. If the metaphor starts in us a process of transformation then it is a sure sign that it is alive. Now when we speak of such a process of transformation what we are in fact doing is "interpreting" the metaphor, that is, articulating the transformation that the metaphor evokes in us. Such transformation can never be explained literally. It has to be interpreted: "It is like..." To explain it literally would be the beginning of the end of the life of the metaphor — at least in us.

It is in this sense that I understand Karma-and-Punarjanma as a metaphor. I take them to be expressions of religious experiences which are in space time but not of space-time. Religious experience though expressed in the language of space-time cannot be understood as space time language is normally understood. This is because religious language is first and foremost metaphor-language. Metaphor-language speaks the language of information but it intends to stress the transformation that it promises to evoke. Through what it *says* it points to what it *means* and it means what the experience is, and not how it appears. Space-time language speaks of physical realities inasmuch as they are physically experienced. Metaphor-language speaks of space-time realities but refers to their holistic experience. The "saying" of a metaphor is like the tip of an iceberg; there is more to it than meets the eye.

My thesis then is that Karma-and-Punarjanma have to be interpreted as a metaphor because it is a vehicle of religious experience. To explain it literally, as is being done, is to take the tip of the iceberg for the whole of it. For literal explanation reduces the explained expression to the level of information and thus neglects the transformation aspect of the metaphor. This involves, of course, the assumption (into which we cannot enter here) that all religious experience expresses itself through metaphor

language, that is, language which through its fixed meaning points to and evokes the experience of Significance.

The reason for interpreting Karma-and-Punarjanma as a metaphor (that is, as a vehicle of religious experience) has admittedly to be established. The following contribution aims at showing that intrinsically Karma-and-Punarjanma are meaningful if interpreted as metaphor in the context of the Hindu world-view. This is not just an academic exercise but a rediscovery of an old fountain of religious Significance. This means that our metaphor is capable of making our lives with regard to its struggles and sufferings more meaningful, more significant!

3. Karma is only an aspect of the more comprehensive metaphor of Prakriti. Prakriti means many things but the chief and primary meaning is "body", an organic body. It is not so much the coarse body as the "ur-body" as it were. Its main connotations are: the *primary matter* from which all things come into being, in which they subsist and into which they return when they decay or die. And consequently, Prakriti is the *primary body* in which everything that is material has its origin, existence and final goal. A body connotes of course an interconnected organism. This implies that the welfare of the individual "parts" is directly or indirectly connected with the welfare of the whole body. What we usually call the part is really an *abstraction*. For what exists is the whole body. It is aspects and functions of this body that we designate as parts and faculties. In reality we do not have an eye as such. An eye or a hand implicitly states that it is an abstraction. We abstract a function from the body and give it a name. But this does not mean that we have an eye or a hand as such. It is the whole body that sees with the help of the eye. And it is the whole body that functions with the help of the hand or the foot. Hence when we speak of the "parts" we are really speaking of the whole from a particular point of view. In an organism no part can exist on its own. The whole organism is responsible for the welfare of all the parts which are mutually interdependent. Hence the real nature of the part can be understood only from the viewpoint of the whole body.

In its broadest sense Karma is what the body does and achieves. Both the process and the product are connoted by

Karma. The process is transient but not the product. The "doing" (process) becomes the "done" (product) and is part and parcel of the body. That is why the very earliest actions that a child does remain stored in his organism. Naturally what is in the body is also indirectly active inasmuch as it acts when the whole organism acts. Furthermore the Karma of one part (or one body) acts on and affects another part (or another body). The totality of Karma is interdependent.

When blown up to cosmic dimensions Prakriti is the whole cosmos and Karma is the totality of the activity that connects every single part with the whole body. What is true of the microcosmic body is much more so of the macrocosmic body. When the whole body acts in and through its parts, the parts have to co-operate. The contribution of every part is important for the welfare of the body.

II

The Gita uses explicitly the analogy of the body. In Chapter 13 for example Prakriti is synonymous with Shariram and Kshetram. We meet here with the symbolism of the cosmic Purusha expressed in terms of the Prakriti:

Hands and feet It has on every side, on every side eyes, heads, mouths, and ears; in the world all things encompassing [changeless] It abides. Devoid of all the senses, It sheds light on all their qualities, [from all] detached, and yet supporting all; free from Nature's constituents, It yet experiences them. 13.13-14 (Zaehner)

There is a similar account of this reality in Chapter 11.15-31 where Arjuna sees the "worlds" in the body (deha v.7, sharira v.13 and again deha v.15) of Shri Krishna. Indeed the point of the Theophany in this chapter is to show how everything, even a decision to fight or not to fight is ultimately dependent on the Blessed Lord. Everything and every happening is rooted in the body of the Lord.

The Gita uses another analogy for the interconnectedness of all finite things and that is the analogy of Yajna (sacrifice). We have for example in 3.14-15:

From food do (all contingent beings derive and food derives from rain; rain derives from sacrifice and sacrifice from works (Karma). From Brahman work (Karma) arises, know this, and Brahman is born from the Imperishable; therefore is Brahman, penetrating everywhere, forever based on sacrifice. (Zaehner)

Of course Yajna here is used in two senses: first as *ritual sacrifice* which is a symbolic representation of the second which consists in the *ontological interconnectedness of all finite things*.

But the Gita itself brings together the two symbols of body and sacrifice:

I am in this very body in so far as I appertain to sacrifice, O best of men who bodies bear. 8.4cd (Zaehner)

What is important for our consideration is the fact that the finite beings can in this world-view be understood only as interdependent parts of a macrocosmic organism.

Karma is indeed such interdependence, living interdependence. The activity of a living organism is the activity of complex interdependence. In this sense, Karma is merely another (holist) way of looking at Prakriti. For Prakriti is pra-kriti, that is, the onward, forward movement that we call *process* (pro-cedere!). Seen as an organism the totality is called Prakriti but seen as a process of active interdependence it is known as Karma.

Now Karma implies not only activity but also passivity. For wherever there is a doing there is also concomitantly a "becoming", and vice versa. Doing and becoming are merely two sides of the same coin called Karma.

In such a world-view it is important to remember that every object and every being and every event is as it were a unit of Karma. Everything is born from and of the totality called Prakriti and when it is destroyed or dies it goes back to this totality. There is nothing which is outside this Prakriti. *Every thing*, be it small or big, is part of this body and is interconnected with and interdependent on the total body.

In keeping with our interpretation given above, the body is only the physics of the larger reality. That is to say, Prakriti is

the physics of the larger reality called Purusha. Purusha is not just the overplus of being and the surplus of meaning; rather Purusha means the whole, the all-encompassing, reality, both body and soul. Mere Purusha is an abstraction; in reality Purusha is the whole being. Only when we stress the "spiritual" aspect of such a being we make an abstraction and call it Purusha. Unfortunately the tendency to reify this abstraction is so common that Purusha has come to imply merely the spiritual side alone. In truth however Purusha means the total reality, that reality which has its source within and its expression outside. Similarly in any holistic usage of language body always means the embodied soul; otherwise we should be speaking not of the body but of the corpse! Thus Prakriti means a living body, the embodied Purusha! It is because we wish to *distinguish* the "material" aspect from the "spiritual" that we speak of Prakriti and Purusha. Prakriti then, is the body aspect of the metaphor through which we experience the reality of the Purusha. Hence when we speak of Karma what we really mean is the Karma of Prakriti which is in reality the embodied Purusha. Karma is the Karma of the Purusha.

If Purusha connotes both the aspects of totality and of spirituality as the root of the Prakriti, and Prakriti the "manifestation" (the expressive), the bodily aspect of the Purusha. Karma connotes primarily the activity side of the embodied Purusha. Ultimately Prakriti is the expression of Purusha and Karma his activity.

3.1 If we take our analogy of the cosmic Purusha seriously it will show signs of strain. Being ourselves merely parts of the whole we are not in a position to look at all the parts (i.e. at the whole body) from the all-embracing viewpoint of the Purusha. From his point of view his activity, one could say, is holistic, i.e. for the welfare of the whole body. Our view, however much it may try to be holistic, will always remain partial. (But then were we able to have an all encompassing holistic view we would not need an analogy at all.) There is added reason for the failure of our analogy. Our lives manifest not only interdependence but are a witness to the consistent tendency towards independence, an independence which strives to make itself the centre of the world. Besides, the experience of our own body clearly proves that one part can so dominate the

rest of the body that the actual situation is in fact a very far cry from the ideal of the welfare of the whole body!

However in spite of these serious strains I wish to retain the analogy of the cosmos as a living body because it is the foundation-stone of the Gita world-view. Besides there is a basic difference between our bodies and the cosmic body. We might understand the analogy better if we keep in mind the fact that *our body is an interdependent body. It is born from and because of other bodies, and it can exist because of and with the help of other bodies.* But when we take the whole cosmos as a living body, we understand it to be a body which is more than and different from our bodies. It is a body that is in itself and for itself! This body is the only one of its kind. Whatever its parts may do, they will never be in a position to dominate or to destroy the whole body as can happen in the case of our bodies. However much destruction the parts may cause to the other parts, the body as a whole will always survive. No part is so powerful that it could destroy the whole body. This is because this particular body is in itself and for itself. It is dependent on itself and not on anything outside itself. Such is not the case with our bodies which are dependent on the "outside" world in every way. Because of this they are susceptible to and in need of the outside world. But the world-body so to speak is independent of an "outside" world because it exists of itself, in itself and for itself. It is, to repeat again, the only body of its kind.

3.2 If we keep in mind the specific difference between the world-body and our bodies, (namely, that it is a body in itself and for itself, requiring nothing from "outside" in order to exist,) then it will be easier to understand that the body cannot be affected (positively or negatively) from the outside since there is no outside! The parts are related to one another *within* the body itself. What they can at the most achieve is to disturb the relationship to one another but the totality of the relationships between the parts can never be wholly destroyed. Destruction is possible only when the thing to be destroyed can become something else. From our premises however since there is nothing outside the world-body it cannot be destroyed into something else. *Our bodies* can be destroyed because there is the possibility of its being turned into a corpse which then becomes part of the earth. Such is not the case with the world-body. That is why it cannot die in our sense of the word.

3.3 We can now proceed further with our analogy. In this world body called Prakriti the relations between the parts themselves can turn sour. The parts can become "sick" and non-co-operative. This can happen in two ways which are in fact complementary aspects of the same process. One, each part can consider itself as the "centre" of the whole organism (or at least behave in that way). That is to say, each part can behave as if it alone mattered. Two, the parts can neglect, ignore or harm the rest of the body. Either of these actions always implies the other. For to make oneself the centre of the organism is to neglect the rest of the body and to neglect the rest of the body is to consider oneself the centre of the organism. The tendency as well as the activity which does this is called *Ahamkara*. It consists in producing the illusion that the part is the real "I", the "Self" (the Atma) of the world-body. Thus the *Ahamkara* is the "I-maker", not the real "I". All the activity which springs from such a misguided and misleading attitude is *Papam* (evil). *Papam* consists of all those desires, thoughts, words and actions which arise from the *Ahamkara* and which strengthen the *Ahamkara*. *Whatever does not help towards the welfare of the whole body but works for the limited goal of the welfare of the part irrespective of the consequences on the rest of the body is papam.*

What is wrong with working for the welfare of the part? The reason is to be sought in the fact that the part as such does not exist. What really exists is the totality of the organism in which *the parts are what they are because of the totality*. To ignore this ontological relationship is the beginning of bondage and to recognize this relationship is the dawn of liberation. *Papam* is the outcome of our ignoring the ontological relationship of interdependence of the parts among themselves. It is the result of our effort to "alienate" the part from the rest of the body.

The consequences of such effort are disastrous. For one thing one becomes totally oblivious of one's real nature. One turns a blind eye to the core of one's being and begins to function on a superficial level. The central realm of one's being, the quintessence of one's personality, the Purusha-level, is completely overlooked; its values become factually non-existent. One takes over the values of the superficial level, of the external level, as it were. They are the values of matter, of the material level which can be summed up and characterized as the two values (more precisely, the pseudo-

values) of likes and dislikes. Basically most of our loving and acting are reducible to these two forces of likes and dislikes. They are indeed *forces* because they force us to act, they goad us on without any reflection on our part to act one way or the other. Before we can make any decision there is already existing in us a movement towards (i.e. a liking for) or a movement away from (i.e. a dislike towards) the object of our decision. If we remain unaware of these movements, then even our conscious reflection cannot escape their influence.

It is here, I think, that the idea of "accumulated past Karma" fits in. There are here two meanings of "past" to be considered. Our bodies are made up of the stuff of this Prakriti. This stuff has its own past which produces its own specific movements of attraction (likes) and repulsion (dislikes). I do not think that any one can reasonably deny this. There is moreover our own past. From our very conception onwards we have been influenced by a variety of happenings. All this produces too its movements of likes and dislikes. When therefore there is a decision to be made about an object we notice within us (if we are sensitive to these movements) a certain attraction or repulsion. These two influences (which the Gita calls - in Zaehner's translation - "brigands on the road" *paripanthinau*) are in effect the natural qualities of the realm of space-time. Any "material" body functions according to the laws of "attraction" and "repulsion". When one acts merely according to these laws of matter the implication is that one's self-understanding, one's understanding of one's identity, consists of matter alone! One acts according to one's nature. If one acts materially one is material! When one acts only according to the laws of matter the conclusion obviously is that one consists of matter.

It is not a question here of what one says one is. It is rather a question of how we act and according to what values! Our values from which our actions originate betray our real nature. If deep in our hearts we cling to material values, we have alas turned ourselves as it were into matter! This means that we have entirely neglected the realm of the Purusha, the realm from where we should be getting our genuine values. The level of the Purusha which is the source of our being and our consciousness is what gives the aspect of wholeness and wholesomeness to our

lives. Overlooking this fundamental fact is the cause of our undoing. We become "ignorant" of, blind to, the higher dimension of our being. This means, we act onesidedly, that is, materialistically. Our one-sidedness cannot lead us to final liberation since there is no liberation for such an one-sided perspective. It is one-sided because it overlooks precisely this liberating aspect in our lives.

Now, matter behaves like matter, that is, like the modern concept of energy which cannot be destroyed, matter too cannot be destroyed. It only changes its form, it is born again in another form. Our bodies, too, like everything material, undergo constant change. But at death they will be born again in a different form altogether. This process of energy that keeps on changing its form has no end. There is no end to the relentless process of matter being born again and again.

What the metaphor of Karma and Punarjanma is meant to evoke in us is the realization that if we follow the laws of matter (i.e. we act merely according to our likes and dislikes) we shall be like matter, we shall be born again and again. The realm of the Purusha will forever remain closed to us. We shall move endlessly from one form to another. There is no way out of the realm of matter and energy. *It is of the nature of matter to keep on changing its form endlessly, to be born repeatedly.* To live according to material values, to ignore higher values, is to condemn oneself to the realm of matter, that is, to be born again and again.

The metaphor of Karma-and-Punarjanma is a religious metaphor, born of religious experience, and aims at evoking a religious experience. It lays bare our one-sided stress on the material aspect of our being at the expense of the holistic experience. It is meant to open our eyes to the fact that we are ignorant of our real nature, of the real nature of the world around us, of the word of the Purusha, of the holistic nature of God-World-Man (to speak in Christian words). It intends to expose the hollowness of our values, the hypocrisy of our belief-systems and the superficiality of our lives. Above all, it makes us realize our oneness with this world; it shows that our real liberation consists in working for the welfare of the whole world-body. Anything less than that is bound to lead to bondage. Though the metaphor of Karma-and-Punarjanma is part of the Gita world-view, when interpreted in this manner it becomes relevant and accessible to all who are open to it.

It can become meaningful to anyone who is willing to reflect on and examine his value-system critically. Connected with it, is the motivation it mediates to work for an integral way of liberation. It is neither one-sidedly this-worldly nor other-worldly. It promotes an integral approach to liberation, that is, to religion as liberation.

4. It is in such a context that the doctrine of Nishkama-Karma or Karma-Yoga becomes meaningful. For Karma-Yoga is the path that leads to the discovery of higher values. It leads to action but in such a way that the action does not bind anymore. Action is no more an outcome of our likes or dislikes but the conscious exercise of *detached commitment to the welfare of all beings* (i.e. to the welfare of the world-body).

First of all *Karma-Yoga is the cultivation of detachment*. We have to work *selflessly*, that is, we are not to be led by the nose by our likes and dislikes.

Work alone is *your* proper business, never the fruits (it may produce), let not your motive be the fruit of works nor your attachment to (mere) worklessness. Stand fast in Yoga, surrendering attachment; in success and failure be the same and then get busy with your works. Yoga means 'sameness-and-indifference'. For lower far is (the path of) active work (for its own sake) than the spiritual exercise (*yoga*) of the soul. Seek refuge in the soul! How pitiful are they whose motive is the fruit (of works)! Whoso performs spiritual exercise (*yoga*) with the soul (is integrated by the soul) discards here (and now) both good and evil works: brace yourself then for (this) spiritual exercise (*yoga*); for Yoga is (also) skill in (performing) works. For those wise men who are integrated by the soul, who have renounced the fruit that is born of works, these will be freed from the bondage of (re-) birth and fare to that region that knows no ill. 2. 47-51 (Zaehner).

The Gita condemns in no uncertain terms the danger of worklessness. Work is all-important because it is through work that one achieves detachment. No one can avoid work.

For not for a moment can a man stand still and do no work for every man is powerless and made to work by the

constituents born of Nature... Do the work that is prescribed (for you), for to work is better than to do no work at all; for without working you will not succeed even in keeping your body in good repair. This world is bound by bonds of work save where that work is done for sacrifice. Work to this end, then, Arjuna, from (all) attachment freed. 3. 5, 8-9 (Zaehner)

Attachment leads to Punarjanma and detachment frees one from Punarjanma. Attachment means slavery to our likes and dislikes whereas *detachment means freedom from these likes and dislikes and freedom for the welfare of all beings.*

For only by working on did Janaka and his like attain perfection's prize. Or if again you consider the welfare (and coherence) of the world, then you should work (and act). 3.20 Zaehner.

Our likes and our dislikes constrict our horizon and we then live in a world of our own, neglecting thereby the real world. Giving up our narrow interests however makes us remove the blinds that we had put on. We are then in a position to consider the welfare of the world-body because we can see the world as it is. It is such a world-vision alone that will bring us our liberation.

Nirvana that is Brahman too win seers in whom (all) taint-of-imperfection is destroyed; their doubts dispelled, with self controlled, they take their pleasure in the weal of all contingent beings. 5.25 (Zaehner)

Only such work which aims at the welfare of all beings can lead to real joy as well as to final liberation. Because of this, the expressions "detachment", Nishkama-Karma, working for the coherence of the world (*loka-samgraha*) and for the welfare of all beings (*sarva-bhuta-hita*), casting all works on the Lord which occur in the Gita come to have a synonymous echo. For it is detachment that makes us accept the fact that we are part and parcel of a larger body whose soul is the Supreme Lord. In spite of all our 'personality' and 'individuality' in the sphere of pragmatic concerns, our real personality lies in realizing what we are and who we are, namely, living parts of a world-body. Our real

freedom then lies in accepting our role in this world-body. That is why the Gita tells us repeatedly that we have to do our own specific work:

Do the work that is prescribed (for you) ... 3.8

Therefore detached, perform unceasingly the works that must be done ... 3.19

The man who does the work that is his to do, yet covets not its fruits, he it is who at once renounces and yet works on (*yogin*) ... 6.1 (Zaehner)

Such work is the kind which fits in with our own nature. For As is a man's own nature, so must he act, however wise he be. (All) creatures follow Nature: what will repression do? 4.33 (Zaehner)

Since we have our being in a larger organism it is but logical that the nature of our work will depend on the nature of our function in this larger organism.

One thing is certain: no amount of charitable work is going to save the world if the work is not done for the welfare of the whole world. This motive obliges in two directions. Firstly on the subjective side we have to become selfless and detached where our work is concerned. And secondly on the objective side we have to search for more efficient methods of working for the welfare of the world. This means that though the subjective side may be selfless, the action itself, if it is not effective as regards the welfare of all beings, will be of no avail. On the objective side too there must be the necessary selflessness so that the welfare of the whole body is not jeopardized. Final liberation requires therefore work that aims at the welfare of all both on the subjective as well as on the objective side.

Naturally enough the final goal of the welfare of the whole world does not exclude the proximate goals. In order, for example, to achieve my final goal I have to eat so that I may have the necessary strength. This is in order since such proximate goals

lead to the final goal but they have to be selfless. That is, the goal of eating is motivated not by likes and dislikes but by the final goal. Also, the liking that may be produced by eating is by no means a hindrance to the ultimate goal. Liking as an effect is all right provided it is not the driving-force of our actions.

In this connection we have to remember that the moral code of the Gita is a novel one. It expects us to function beyond the realm of the good and the bad. What is good and what is bad and what is beyond good and evil? Suppose we see an old beggar dying at our door-step. There are three possible ways of responding to such a situation. One can say that it is not one's business and let the beggar die without any help. This would be morally bad. One could however respond by saying, "Well, if I don't help the dying man, people will speak ill of me but if I do, they will have a good opinion of me. Hence I shall help him." Such an action would be morally good but in the eyes of the Gita it cannot liberate us. We shall still be bound to Punarjanma. It would be as binding as the first. The third possibility is to act because it is the right thing to do in the circumstances. For the Gita the right thing as the circumstances means that *action which aims at the welfare of all beings*. All selfish motivation has to be excluded.

However as a matter of fact one might never know whether an action really promotes such welfare or not. What is required is that we know that it does not hinder such welfare (as far as we are aware) and that we take steps to discover means that will positively promote such welfare. This implies two things: one, there must be absence of selfish motivation. The action should not spring from mere likes or dislikes. Two, it must be an expression of one's concerted and conscientious search for the welfare of the whole world-body. Working for the welfare of the whole world-body requires that we be continuously on the look-out for ever more appropriate ways of promoting the welfare of the whole organism. A static attitude of sticking to one way of doing things would be wrong. For our search has to keep pace with our ever increasing knowledge of the world and its nature. We have to work to find better and more efficient means of contributing to the welfare of larger areas of our world. It is only from such a per-

spective that the legitimate role and function of the sciences can be meaningfully justified.

Finally a word about the goal of all human activity, namely, the welfare of all beings. First of all such a goal is the meeting-point as it were of all activity whether it be religious, moral, social, political, scientific, educational, ecological, human, developmental or medical. As long as our action is not one-sided or at the expense of another it will lead us to the ultimate goal. At the present stage of our history it is good to remind ourselves of this goal, since group interests are encouraged in spite of damage done to the interests of the larger whole. Our world order in general and our political and economic systems in particular would not and cannot pass muster from this point of view. Any genuine reform is possible only from the view-point of the welfare of the whole world-body; any other effort would be merely a cosmetic change. The goal of universal welfare if taken seriously would show us the way how to solve our problems of ecology, energy and re-armament, of women's liberation and male domination, of economic and political systems. Our world-order is in a mess not merely because we lack the good-will to change it but because we lack the necessary ideals which would evoke our good-will. It is not so much our selfish practices that are the real disaster but the lack of an ultimate goal that would transform our practices and shape our societies. The welfare of all beings could be such a goal.

Francis X. D'sa

Pope John Paul's Letter on Human Work

The historical character of the Letter

The Pope's Letter in the present context points to three important facts:

1) No power on earth, however spiritual or non political it may claim to be, can be silent about the serious situation in the developing countries where unemployment, under-employment, low wages etc. of the working classes on the one hand contrast and clash with the growth in exploitative strength and wealth of tiny ruling classes on the other. Even in the industrially advanced capitalist countries of the West, a critical situation is developing with a high rate of inflation and increasing unemployment, ranging between 10 - 15 %, for the working classes and enormous accumulation of profits and capital for the multinational corporations and the ruling classes. This situation is becoming a matter of grave concern.

Any religious structure, insofar as it is also part of the socio-cultural system of society, is bound to feel the impact of such developments. It would be forced to respond to the situation in its own way. It is not surprising, therefore, that the present Pope felt the need to come out as the spokesman of the catholic church.

2) The Pope is also under pressure from within the dynamics of the catholic church itself. There are individual catholics and groups of catholics in different parts of the world, particularly in countries where the socio-political contradictions are most apparent, who have taken an unmistakable stand with the exploited working classes, whether industrial or agrarian or both, and are concretely involved in particular forms of struggles of the working classes at different levels. They do this very much in terms of the christian message drawn from the scriptures and from a particular under-

standing of the life of Jesus. It becomes a historical task for the Pope to assure such catholics that the catholic church is also concerned about the exploitation of the working classes and that it too has some reservations about the functioning of present-day monopolistic capitalism.

Yet at the same time the Catholic Church, wherever it exists, but particularly in the countries of the third-world, carries a colonial, capitalist and to some extent feudal legacy. Even if many catholics themselves belong to the exploited classes, the officials and structures of the church are mostly identified with reactionary forces which seek to preserve the interests of exploiter classes denying even subsistence-level amenities to the great majority of people in these countries. A large number of priests and religious directly serve the elite class by running prestigious educational institutions which are designed to promote the interests of the upper classes. The officials of the church have patiently and faithfully waited upon the ruling, elite, privileged class in society. On the whole, the clergy and religious, barring a few, lead a luxurious life which hardly 10 % of the people of these countries can afford. The gospel which is assiduously proclaimed is so adulterated that it in no way endangers the life-style of the big industrialists, rich landlords, ruling elites, upper class, the clergy and religious and the expensive massive institutions which form the pride of local churches.

Apart from the above over-all elitist involvement, the church of late has also entered into positive collaboration with the industrial class in countries like India by way of conducting business-management, personnel-management and labour-relations institutes in the different parts of the country. This is often done as part of the already existing elite institutions which directly cater to the interests of the industrial managerial class despite their claims of concerns for social justice and for spreading the social teachings of the church.

Because the greatest proportion of the church's investment by way of its personnel and financial resources are devoted to the service of the ruling classes of our capitalist societies, the Pope is socially bound to offer to this dominant section of the church an assurance that their functioning is also in keeping with

the teachings of the church insofar as their avowed aim is "to promote social justice". Quite naturally, therefore, the Pope's Letter does not tell Catholics clearly to take the side of the exploited classes. It does not call on them to join the struggles of the oppressed masses. It urges them rather to play the middle-man's role between the working class and the owning class. As such, the Pope effectively gives a green signal for the church's existence and functioning pretty much as it presently is structured and functions.

3) This Letter of Pope John Paul II seeks to provide basic justification for the kind of role he has personally been playing at the level of international politics. His visits to the different countries of Asia, Africa and South and Central America, called 'pastoral' by the Vatican, were really political in their end result, insofar as the Pope allowed himself to be used by the political ruling classes and personalities to justify their political control, social domination and economic exploitation. The Pope implicitly gave a moral guarantee to their socio-political functioning.

Of late, the Pope has clearly enough pointed out the failures and limitations of capitalism; but he has not been able to pinpoint the sources of capitalist exploitation and call them by their real names. In fact, he cannot afford to do that because if he does, the capitalist powers can very well point out that the functioning of the Vatican is not different from the functioning of any capitalist power or class. The recently reported embezzlement of the Vatican Bank with the Banco Ambrosiano of Italy is but one instance. The financial investments the Vatican has in the different financial enterprises, national and multi-national corporations, are highly secretive precisely because the unravelling of them will be very embarrassing and damaging to the so-called 'spiritual' role of the Catholic church. Quite understandably, the whole tone of John Paul's letter is not only restrained but also supportive of capitalism.

Lastly, the Pope's personal role in what is happening in Poland gets an indirect commentary in this Letter on Human Labour. While on the one hand, the Pope keeps telling the clergy and the religious in the church that their role is 'spiritual', and that they should desist from entering politics, his own role in favour of Solidarity Union as against the Communist Government of Poland is blatantly political. It would be worth the effort to

reflect on whether the Pope would support so outrightly any other trade Union if the government in question is a non-communist, capitalist power.

Following the example of the Pope, most of the church's hierarchy refuses to clearly take the side of the exploited classes. This is exemplified by the action of the CBCI, which declined to express their support to the two hundred and fifty thousand striking textile workers of Bombay after they had been out of their jobs for over a year: instead they issued an innocuous statement urging the management and the workers to come to an amicable settlement!

In the light of the above observations, we will take up the main points the Pope makes in his Letter, and by examining them we will show how the catholic church, being very much part of the capitalist structure and functioning within capitalistic logic, looks at Human Work, and at the way human work is exploited by capitalist powers. Then we shall study the solution the church proposes to the problems ensuing therefrom.

(a) Acknowledging global situation of exploitation, but reluctant to reflect on specific realities

In the Introduction to the Letter, the Pope defines the task of the church as one of calling "attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society" (p.9). The Pope insinuates the fact that historically Capitalism has treated man as a mere instrument of production and has made capital the basis, efficient factor and purpose of production. Such a state of affairs, the Pope infers has allowed flagrant injustices to persist or created new ones. One such injustice, according to the Pope, is the proletarianization of not only the working classes but also of the working intelligentsia (pp. 24-25).

The Pope carefully evades other very important questions:

How exactly has Capitalism led the whole world and particular societies in it into situations of injustice? What are the

social and political mechanisms it has evolved to carry out systematic exploitation in more and more efficient ways? What are the types of social classes it has given birth to? What different mechanisms of political control have been shaped by the owning class, and how were they shaped? What has been the process through which the economically and socially dominant classes have become the ruling class in the capitalist societies? So long as these questions are not posed and answered, and only some broad statements are made, the effort is pretty much innocuous and the guilt of the perpetrators of injustice remains hidden. The final question is: Can the Pope afford to do that given the close links that exist between the capitalist structures and the church's own capitalistic functioning?

(b) Afraid to analyse society scientifically...

The Pope makes it clear right at the start of his Letter that "It is not for the Church to analyse scientifically" (p.8) the consequences brought about by changes in different modes of production. Such a stance on the part of the church is indeed pathetic. Unless one can understand society in its structural elements and see how a particular type of structuring leads society to a corresponding type of functioning, one cannot really take stock of the present situation of exploitation and oppression. In other words, there is an inherent link between the way a society is structured and the way it functions, so that if a society's economic system is capitalist, by its very nature it differentiates the members at the level of ownership of the means of production, the use of labour, patterns of distribution and levels of consumption. The economic differentiation leads on to social differentiation in terms of social classes, and the two together result in the formation of a ruling class with its mechanisms of political control, both the formal mechanisms such as State power and the informal but real tools of class power. This would be as true with regard to the internal functioning of a society as with regard to its relation to other nation-states. The emergence of imperialist powers at the international levels can only be gauged correctly by means of a scientific analysis.

This precisely is what the Pope is reluctant to do for fear of recognizing the classes and powers which are the perpetrators of injustice at local, national and international levels.

If such an analysis is not undertaken-and the Pope refuses to undertake it-all that can result are some oft-repeated platitudes which in effect would not make any difference; and this is what the Pope has chosen to do.

(c) Lacking a coherent vision of history

The Pope does not explain the background from which Capitalism came into being, though it is precisely that which can explain how Capitalism reduced human work to a mere instrument of production and made capital the basis, efficient factor and purpose of production. He refers to the fact that "various forms of neo-capitalism or collectivism have developed. Various new systems have been thought out" etc., (p.24), again without examining the rationale on which the various forms of neo-capitalism came into being.

The Pope also refers to Marxism and to scientific socialism and communism, but as though they dropped from the blue! Marxism cannot be understood neither as an ideology nor as a political praxis except in the context of societal contradictions that were caused by the capitalist industrialization of 19th century Europe.

Thus the Pope fails to work out a theory of history explaining both the direction and the process of change. Hence, his Letter on human work is basically a-historical, and therefore cannot help anyone to insert himself into the movement of change and be instrumental in creating history.

(d) Addicted to Capitalism and averse to Socialism

The Pope once again confirms "the church's teaching on ownership, on the right to private property even when it is a question of the means of production" (p.41). He goes on to qualify this right to private property saying: "Christian tradition has never upheld this right as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone." (pp 41-42).

As such, he says that the church's teaching "diverges radically from the programme of collectivism as proclaimed by Marxism and put into practice in various countries..." (p.41), because the latter tends to an "a priori elimination of private ownership of the means of production" (p.44). After briefly spelling out what that "elimination of private ownership" means, the Pope fears that such an eventuality would lead the State in the socialist countries to monopolize the administration and disposal of the means of production, and thus the "part-owner" character of the individual persons would be endangered (p.44).

At the same time, the Pope expresses a subtle difference with liberal capitalism insofar as the latter is not willing to accept the qualification of the Popes with regard to the use of private property. "Socialising" for John Paul effectively means the retaining of private ownership of the means of production but "*by associating labour with the ownership of capital, as far as possible...*" (underlining mine). And this would be done by allowing the workers to participate in the management's decision-making process.

Such an attitude towards Marxism and Liberal Capitalism betrays a naivety as regards Marxism and a vested interestedness as regards Liberal Capitalism on the part of the Pope. It is because he chooses to ignore the fact that Marxism *has* achieved something concrete in such a way that it has become an appealing factor to the working classes all over the world, whereas Liberal Capitalism has gone on strengthening its hold on the working classes of particular societies and nations, leaving the working classes in greater misery.

(e) Unscientific attitude towards State Power

John Paul reaffirms the traditional catholic church's stand with regard to State Power as though it were a 'neutral entity'. The Pope's letter refers to State power as the "indirect employer" whose responsibility it is to substantially determine one or other facet of the labour relationship, thus conditioning the conduct of the direct employer when the latter determines in concrete terms the actual work contract and labour relations. In this way, an ethically correct labour policy will become a reality (p. 49).

State Power, in a capitalist society, often assuming the form of parliamentary democracy, is very much the strong hold of the ruling class. In a country like India, the average election expenditure for parliamentary elections is 3 to 4 hundred thousand rupees per candidate, and hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty thousand rupees for the Assembly elections per candidate. One can well imagine which class and strata of society can afford this amount of expenditure. Also, the top industrial class in India would not stoop to stand in the elections because they know that they can very well control the functioning of State power in their favour. How can this class condition the conduct of the direct employer? We are just now witnessing how the Indian government is solidly backing the textile mill-owners of Bombay city against the workers who are two hundred and fifty thousand strong.

We also know how the State in several countries of the third world has assumed dictatorial powers, often using the military against the working classes, and in favour of the bourgeois elements.

The Pope thus fails to take note of the real nature and function of the State in various societies; he ignores the use of force and coercion by the State; he refuses to acknowledge that given a particular political organisation of a society, a set of legitimizing concepts and values supportive of the powers that be come into existence. As such, his reflections on the State as the regulator of the conduct of the direct employer are at best wishful thinking.

Conclusion

There are many other points in the Pope's letter which could be commented on, such as his 'personalist approach', workers' unions, his notion of class-struggle etc. But, given the purpose of this short write-up, it suffices to say that none of these have anything new other than what has been taught by the church ever since Leo XIII.

In short, the Pope's letter completely lacks a scientific analysis. Consequently his reflections on injustice, exploitation, mass poverty, inequality between nations, are bereft of valid substance. His words on the church's role are empty insofar as the Pope refuses to

acknowledge the dynamics of history and the process of social change. One thing that comes through quite clearly is his 'personalist approach' which is obviously a western, capitalist, reactionary model. The final lesson is that the Pope and the church stand by the western capitalist system and feel inhibited even to examine the achievements of socialistic efforts. The end result is that the Pope concludes with a whole lot of platitudes saying nothing new, nothing significant. The letter is historically repetitive, theologically traditional, analytically unscientific and functionally vested-interested. In other words, the Pope and the catholic church will go on pronouncing the same traditional teachings and will continue to, play the same social role very much in alliance with the capitalistic powers and in keeping with the capitalist logic. The solutions to the serious issues of the working class will come from the dynamics of the working-classes themselves, and not from the church.

Stan Lourdusamy

Note: The page-numbers indicated within brackets refer to John Paul II's Encyclical, *LABOREM EXERCENS*, St. Paul's Publications, Bombay, 1981.

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